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Sent: Thursday, July 14, 2011 2:15 PM

To: crc@acton-ma.gov

Subject: Further Comments on the Development of Conservation Restrictions for the Caouette-Simeone Land

Local agriculture is always under pressure. It is inherently risky from a business perspective, at the mercy of nature and markets and restrictions on the experienced labor needed to operate, yet, so far, family farms persist in Massachusetts and in Acton. We have continued to attend CR Committee meetings out of a sense of obligation not just to try to protect the interests of Stonefield Farm, which currently leases the Caouette-Simeone Land, but also to try to insure that local agriculture is not unnecessarily compromised now or in the future.

We strongly recommend that the Conservation Restrictions do not restrict or redirect farming on this land for the following reasons:

1. The Town Meeting decision to buy the Caouette-Simeone land was a vote to:
 - a. Support local agriculture, not as defined by a special interest group, but the agriculture that was then being practiced.
 - b. Preserve an open space and its beauty.
 - c. Protect historically significant land.

The open space, its beauty, the birds and other wildlife seen on the property are the result of the conventional farming as it has been done for over 50 years, farming that is sustainable, multigenerational and financially viable, as well as always concerned about the environment and visitors to the fields.

We find disturbing the prejudicial language and apparent attempts to scare or discomfort the CR Committee when there has been no demonstration of harm done to the land or to the public with existing agricultural practices.

2. The previous owners of the property went through additional expense and pressures to insure that the fields would continue to be farmed productively. Their father, with their help, had worked this land and they respected the investment in time and hard labor that had been made.
3. As others have commented, Conservation Restrictions are an awkward and probably inappropriate place for detailed restrictions or allowable uses that are otherwise covered by or permitted under state and federal regulations. As we have mentioned, an organic farmer in a neighboring town argued against the inclusion of organic farming requirements in the CR covering land he was using. In another neighboring town where much farmland is now protected by Agricultural and Conservation restrictions, there is no interference in the use of established farming practices. What is important is that as much land as possible be kept productive and protected from development. The CR Committee is charged with developing the Restrictions for the long-term protection of the

Caouette-Simeone land, but should be mindful of the impact of what they decide on future acquisition or cooperative protection of other farmland in Acton.

4. We do not wish to argue the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of farming. We do feel the need to point out that from our family's and personal experience conventional agriculture means learning from all sources and taking advantage of sustainable practices like composting and winter rye to protect fields from erosion and add organic matter to soils in the spring. Conventional agriculture has also benefitted over the years from academic research and industry developments; this includes providing valuable tools like chemicals that work very selectively and dissipate quickly, with the timing of application protecting beneficial insects. We have developed a farm operation that supports 4 families full time, 3 part time, as well as having many valuable part-time workers. When our parents started with what some might consider "pre-industrial" farming in the 1930s, they only survived and depended on much free labor from relatives. In spite of the many "No Farms, No Food" bumper stickers, agriculture in Massachusetts is still under many pressures. We can only hope that being "Green" in Acton includes supporting existing agriculture.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

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